

This is my 11th State of the City. We've been through much together. We've had tough times together. And, most importantly, we've changed our city together.

Take a look at some of these pictures behind me.

This is a parking lot in Downtown's RiverSouth District around the time I took office in 2000. Here's Lifestyle Condominiums in that same spot today.

Here's the West Side Health Center on Sullivant Avenue in 2000. Here's the new West Side Health Center on West Broad Street today.

This is what Broad and High looked like a decade ago. Here it is today.

Here's some houses in Franklinton some 10 years ago, here are those same houses today.

And here's what I looked like in 1973. And this is what I'll look like by the end of the year.

I want to thank all of you for braving the cold to come out here tonight. We've had more snow than in any February in 100 years, and our Snow Warriors and 311 service operators have been putting in long, difficult hours.

In fact they're out clearing our streets right now. So let's give them a hand.

This was a terrible winter. Unfortunately, historic winters bring a historic number of potholes. If it gets any worse, our streets might start to look like this one on Broad Street in 1986.

As the snow clears, the potholes appear. We will see more potholes than we have seen in a long time. Big potholes demand a big response.

Effective immediately, we will intensify our capacity to fill these potholes. During the month of March, we will nearly double the number of potholes we filled in March of last year. We will work at night. We will work on the weekends. And we will do it with more people. This is a priority.

We cannot do anything about the potholes on the interstates—70, 71, 270 and 670. Those are the state's responsibility. But I don't want our streets to look like the one behind me.

I want to thank Councilman Hearcel Craig for his support on this and all Public Service issues.

It is a privilege to be here tonight at the Lincoln Theater, where so many legendary entertainers have performed, like Duke Ellington, Sarah Vaughn, Nancy Wilson and

Sammy Davis Jr., and where many living legends are performing today, like local blues guitarist Sean Carney, New Orleans' great Trombone Shorty, opera star Denyce Graves, Jeanette Williams and our own Byron Stripling.

This renovated theater is the cornerstone of the King Lincoln District, a neighborhood that was forgotten and neglected for many years.

Decades ago, Interstate 71 cut the King Lincoln District off from the rest of the city. Now, that wound must be healed. We must reconnect the disconnected.

At our request, the Ohio Department of Transportation has agreed to make sure the connection right here at Long Street is restored. We will build a cap over the freeway to bridge the gap between here and Downtown.

This cap will be similar to the one that connects the Short North to Downtown on High Street over I-670. Now the East Side will also be reconnected by a platform strong enough to support buildings, businesses and, most of all, jobs. Until a developer steps up, the cap will be green space. The south side of Spring Street will be green space as well.

This project, the largest in ODOT history, will create thousands of jobs and reverse the mistakes of the past.

This is just one more way in which the King Lincoln District is coming back.

I want to recognize those here tonight who never gave up on this neighborhood, like Clara Rumph who has owned Aire's Beauty Salon right here in this building for more than 40 years.

Clara's here tonight. Please stand.

And I also want to recognize those pioneers who have helped renew this neighborhood, such as Charity Martin-Via of Urban-Spirit right down the street, and Tony Hutchins, Eric Carmichael and Mac Williams of Zanzibar right across the street.

The resurgence of this great neighborhood is an example of what can happen when we come together, believe in ourselves, and stand up for one another.

This revitalized area reminds us to endure even through the greatest of challenges.

Lest we forget, one year ago we were standing on the edge of catastrophe. In the midst of the worst recession since the Great Depression, our budget fell short by more than \$100 million. There was no prospect of closing that gap without mass layoffs of police, firefighters and moving to every-other-week trash pickup.

We made big cuts like closing pools and recreation centers, reducing bulk trash collection, eliminating the yard waste program, reducing health services and enacting across-the-board employee furloughs. Our city faced a year of reckoning.

So we set forth a three-point plan: First, new revenue; second, government reform; and finally, aggressive job creation.

Our citizens responded to the call. They enacted the first part of our three-point plan by supporting a tax increase at a time when they made less money, and many were unemployed. But we were successful because our residents put the common good ahead of self-interest.

This was an act of courage.

Because of this, the state of our city is strong. And we are now headed down the steady road to prosperity.

Thank you, Columbus.

You see, we don't know what we've got until it's almost taken away. We had to live through tough times the past two years so we could come out of them stronger and better as a city.

Now our budget is balanced, our neighborhood services are coming back and we're hiring new police and firefighters while other cities are doing just the opposite.

But we are not out of the woods yet. We still have many difficult challenges ahead, challenges we will address over time, not overnight.

The steady road to prosperity requires a recognition that the day-to-day duty of city government is to make sure it works for the people it serves.

Our road is steady, but steady does not mean we should be satisfied with the status quo.

As I've said countless times before, those cities that stay the same fall behind. Great cities must change, must solve old problems with new ideas, throw off the shackles of complacency and push for a better life.

A better life begins with government reform.

We will continue to be the best-managed city in the nation. All three major rating agencies reaffirmed Columbus' Triple-A credit rating. Columbus is the only large city in the nation with the best possible credit score.

Our City Auditor Hugh Dorrian is a key contributor to this success.

Our Triple-A rating speaks volumes about our financial management and saves millions of taxpayers' dollars through lower interest rates.

We promised the voters last year that our reforms would save \$100 million over 10 years, and in just seven months we have already taken steps to keep that promise. In fact, we already have a projected savings of more than \$90 million over the next decade. In time we will surpass our original promise.

Savings and efficiencies should begin where we spend the most, our workforce. Now I believe we have the best public employees in all of America, and they deserve good benefits. But those benefits must be in line with the market.

Four of five major employee groups have already agreed to roll back their pensions.

We are keeping our promises.

Also, Councilman Troy Miller has been a partner in this effort, and I want to recognize him for his work.

In some ways, our benefits are greater than the market provides. In another, we are shamefully below what has now become a common practice for employers. And that's domestic partner benefits.

Companies like Nationwide, Cardinal Health and Limited Brands have been treating their employees equally for years. Franklin County and the Columbus City Schools recently followed suit.

We must extend domestic partner health benefits to our city employees.

Domestic partner health benefits are affordable, and more importantly, it's the right thing to do.

I want to thank Councilman Andy Ginther who has advocated for this since he has been on City Council. I look forward to working with Andy and all council members on this issue.

We spend 71 percent of our entire city budget on protecting our citizens. As such, reform is also required in our Divisions of Fire and Police.

I asked Walter Distelzweig, our new chief of police, to conduct a top-to-bottom review of the division to change what needed to be changed.

After extensive research and outreach, the chief last month announced a new Patrol Reform Plan, the most comprehensive deployment reform in three decades.

The chief's common-sense plan puts police where they are needed most—when they are needed most. More officers will be on the streets in higher-crime areas when more crime occurs—in the evenings and on the weekends.

Think about that: more officers when we need them the most, and more flexibility to react when crime is on the move in any neighborhood.

This should not be a revolutionary idea.

I am asking our community to support this plan and support the chief in this important reform. If there are those who think there can be improvements to this plan, come to the table and work with the chief.

The court case that was resolved just yesterday could have, and should have, been avoided.

Change can be difficult, but that's no excuse for sticking with the status quo when what we need is reform.

We must also address the mass retirement of police and firefighters, and we have already started. I met with 50 new police recruits on Monday, their first day of class.

Hiring more police and firefighters is a priority. But we must also make the most of the ones we have. That means those police officers and firefighters performing civilian work must be moved to the street protecting the public, wherever possible.

I thank Councilman Ginther for his leadership on these and other Public Safety issues.

Reform isn't just about government. It's also about reforming the way we live, our health, our lifestyles and our environment.

A prosperous city is a healthy city and an active city, and it is time to step up our fight against childhood obesity and diabetes.

If we do not change our habits, our youngest generation is on pace to have a shorter lifespan than their parents.

During the most recent school year, almost half of our fifth-graders were overweight, and more than 74,000 Columbus adults have diabetes. The problem is much worse among African Americans.

This is unacceptable.

Councilwoman Charleta Tavares has long been a passionate advocate for healthier kids, and I want to recognize her for her efforts in this area.

Many kids have very little access to fresh foods, but easy access to fast food.

Just look on the map behind me. Families with diabetes are more likely to live in areas without grocery stores, but have plenty of burgers, fried chicken, tacos and pizza.

We cannot expect our kids to get healthy while stacking the deck against them with unhealthy choices.

I commend First Lady Michelle Obama for advocating for this cause on the national level.

In Columbus, the Institute for Active Living started two years ago. It is bringing more farmers markets and encouraging fun physical activities in our neighborhoods.

We have also taken the lead on community gardening. Thanks to hundreds of volunteers and organizations like the Franklin Park Conservatory, there are already 130 community gardens in Columbus, teaching our youth about nutrition and food.

Kwodwo Ababio grows all his fresh produce in Ama Vera's community garden right behind the New Harvest Urban Arts Center and Cafe in Linden.

Kwodwo uses one portion of the garden to supply food for his restaurant, and he gives the rest to his neighbors.

Kwodwo is here tonight, and I want to thank him for standing up for his neighborhood, and standing up for healthier lives. Please stand.

In addition, we need restaurants to be straight with their customers as to what they are eating and increase healthy options on their menus.

A new Stanford study stated that when restaurants disclose calories, there is a 6 percent reduction in the calories people consumed.

That's why I'm asking Columbus restaurants to step up by voluntarily helping us educate the public about calorie amounts and making healthy choice recommendations to your customers.

To this end, I am establishing the Healthy Choices Crew led by our Health Commissioner, Dr. Teresa Long. This group's mission is to find ways to voluntarily educate the public about what they are eating and provide more healthy items on their menus. Two of the national chains headquartered in Columbus and the Central Ohio Restaurant Association have agreed to serve on this committee. Thank you, Bob Evans, Donatos Pizza and CORA for your help.

Parents need to do their jobs as well. I know how tough it is to raise kids. But parents must also turn off the TV, put up the PlayStation, and play with your kids outside.

I can remember when my kids were young. During the summer months Frankie and I scurried about for activities for them.

There's a lot of information for families out there, but it's hard to find in one central location.

That's why we're creating a special new website by this summer, getactive.columbus.gov.

With one click of the mouse, parents can find a comprehensive list of sports, games and other activities all over Columbus for kids to get out and be fit. It will also give tips on workout routines and healthy recipes, farmers markets and community gardens.

While we're getting fit, 2010 will be a big year for bikes. We are determined to make Columbus Bike City USA.

We have a lot of work to do here. But we must make this a community priority because it helps address obesity, diabetes, heart disease and other health issues. Plus, it's just fun. Anybody can ride a bike, no matter the age.

This summer will be the third year for our Bike Columbus family ride, and I invite all of you to bring your families to participate this year.

We will continue to invest in our 170-mile network of regional bikeways and trails. Tonight I am proud to announce we will set aside \$6 million in our capital budget to connect up the Alum Creek Trail and build signage, striping and an additional 24 miles of bike paths and bike lanes on our city streets. This will advance our Bicentennial Bikeways Plan.

But it's not enough just to build trails and bikeways. We also must change our culture. We are far too dependent on the automobile. And both motorists and cyclists must know the rules of the road. Because sometimes, we must ride and drive on the same pavement. Both riders and drivers have a right to be there.

I want to recognize Jeff Stephens and everybody at Consider Biking for their enthusiasm and support for these efforts.

Our lead in building our bike trails is the Department of Recreation and Parks, and this is its 100th anniversary.

Due to budget constraints, the last few years have been tough for Recreation and Parks. While we are beginning to open all our rec centers, we've deferred maintenance, and it shows. There are still recreation centers that have no air conditioning.

So tonight I am announcing a series of new investments in Recreation and Parks facilities. As we celebrate their centennial anniversary, we will set aside more than \$13 million from our capital budget to clean up and fix up our rec centers, pools, parks and playgrounds.

This is an investment in a basic neighborhood service.

I want to thank Councilwoman Priscilla Tyson for being such a strong champion of recreation and parks.

These parks and rec centers are more than just places for kids to play. They are centers of hope, oases of growth and safe havens for children.

Recreation and Parks has helped shape thousands of residents. Pam (Aw-gooden) Argudin volunteered for our after-school program called Capital Kids at Sullivant Gardens Recreation Center even after her kids grew too old for the program.

Pam has passed this tradition of service to her children. Rosa and Manny are great kids, and have also been active in Sullivant Gardens Rec Center.

I want to recognize the Argudin family for their dedication to their neighborhood and their city. Please stand.

Rosa and Manny need green spaces to grow up in. To protect those green spaces as well as thousands of Rosas and Mannys in this city, we need a greener way of life.

We have made tremendous strides in Columbus, thanks in part to the hard work of our Green Team, led by David Brehm.

We have built green buildings, protected our waterways and reduced our use of energy.

We owe it ourselves and future generations to make Columbus a sustainable community. Getting green is good for business. It creates jobs and improves our overall quality of life.

Our city vehicle fleet has been repeatedly recognized as one of the greenest in the nation. We have made a commitment to only construct green buildings.

We have led the preservation of the Big Darby, our only national scenic river.

Our popular GreenSpot program has signed up almost 1,600 residents, businesses and community groups committed to a greener way of life.

But, we have a glaring piece of unfinished business. A city cannot be truly green unless it has a comprehensive curbside recycling program.

Today, families can pay extra to have recyclables picked up on their curbs, or SWACO offers drop boxes around the city.

The good thing is that drop-box recycling has doubled in the past two years. The bad thing is we have not done enough.

According to a new report, Columbus has one of the worst recycling rates in the nation. We recycle less material than every big city in the country except Indianapolis.

Sixty percent of what we put into the landfill can be reused and recycled. Unfortunately, only 5 percent of Columbus households recycle.

If we keep throwing away all our bottles and cans, we're going to use up our landfill sooner rather than later. That means we'll need a new landfill. Where should we put it?

Should it go in German Village?

Downtown?

Maybe at the Whetstone Park of Roses?

The fact is there are no good options for a new Columbus landfill.

A landfill today would cost \$93 million to build, and as much as \$175 million to build 20 years from now. That money is not sitting around in a bank account. It would likely require a significant property tax increase to fund it.

So it is time to get serious about recycling.

Our city's bicentennial is just two years away. It is a time when we not only celebrate our successes, but begin our city's renaissance.

Residents who participated in our Bicentennial Commission citizen survey said a recycling program was their No. 1 priority for Columbus in 2012.

And they will have one.

Today I am proposing a comprehensive recycling program for every single-family household in Columbus by 2012.

We will seek public input over the coming months about the best way to accomplish this goal. But we will start this discussion by putting our initial proposal on the table.

First, we will make good on our promise to reinstate weekly yard-waste collection this April.

But by 2012, I propose we combine recycling with yard waste removal service on a rotating collection schedule.

This would make sense for several reasons.

During the winter, there's much less yard waste. Yet trucks travel through our city, wasting time, money and energy. Combining yard waste and recycling services on a rotating schedule would better use our public resources.

Better yet, those who don't recycle at all today will be able to recycle conveniently at their curbsides at no additional cost. And those who pay for curbside recycling today will no longer have to do so.

Now, there is no such thing as free recycling. Recycling must be subsidized one way or another. There is a cost to recycle, but it is far less than the long-term cost of not recycling.

If we can divert just 35 percent of our waste from our landfill, we could save more than \$5 million in landfill costs.

But I want to hear from you. We will get your input through a community process that will result in a decision this October about a comprehensive recycling program to be implemented no later than 2012.

Recycling is not a luxury. It is a necessity. As a necessity, it should be a basic neighborhood service.

We've talked about revenue and reform. Now let me turn to an essential element of a prosperous city, the third part of our three-part plan: creating good jobs.

Creating and retaining jobs has never been more difficult than it is today.

Even though we created 4,100 jobs and retained 17,000 jobs last year, the ugly head of this recession gobbled up more jobs than we could create.

We have experienced the worst recession since the Great Depression. Many of our residents are still without work. It is painful to witness their misery and suffering.

For those who are living this nightmare, hang onto hope. This recession has hit so many of us: our friends and neighbors, our moms and dads, our sisters and brothers. But as hard as it may be, keep the faith.

Even with our struggles, we are better off than all the other cities in Ohio.

We're doing better because we fought for every job. And we've had some successes.

The process of creating jobs has changed over time. Job creation is not just about giving tax incentives anymore. Job creation is far more sophisticated in the 21st Century. It now requires creating a high quality of life that leads to business expansion and job growth.

The fact is we lead the state in job creation not because of our tax policy. Because every city offers the same tax incentives. We lead the state in job creation because of our high quality of life.

We have a high quality of life because we've made smart quality of life investments.

With the county, the state and other regional partners, the city invested in Huntington Park, which was named the best new baseball stadium in the country.

I want to acknowledge our Franklin County commissioners, John O'Grady, Paula Brooks and Marilyn Brown for their partnership on this effort.

Also with our partners, the city made investments in the fantastic Grange Insurance Audubon Center, a one-of-a-kind facility where young people can learn about nature right in the heart of urban Columbus.

And we successfully negotiated an expansion at JP Morgan Chase that will yield 1,000 new jobs to the city.

We have broken ground on Columbus Commons at the former City Center site;

The Scioto Mile, Columbus' premier Downtown park space;

The Commons at Buckingham, housing for the low-income and no-income;

We opened this theater, and we started Whitney Condos as part of this neighborhood's revitalization;

And Jackson on High, a new condominium complex in the Short North.

All this in 2009.

This year we will break ground on the Downtown Convention Hotel. This hotel will allow us to land more major national conventions, more customers spending in our restaurants and more jobs for our workforce.

We're putting people back to work.

And as we do that, we must keep the jobs we have now. This is why we must find a solution to a potentially empty arena Downtown.

Frankly, as much as I like the Blue Jackets, this isn't about a hockey team. This is about maintaining the momentum we've achieved in the Arena District, which only 12 years ago was a blighted, vacant, prison site. It is now one of the best entertainment attractions in the country with a growing residential population. Most importantly, the Arena District is home to 5,500 jobs and more than 170 businesses. Don't take success for granted.

A prosperous city understands that every job counts.

That also means counting every one of our residents in the U.S. Census. Because as we count every resident, we receive more dollars from Washington for more jobs, more health care and more human services. So fill out the 2010 Census form. It only takes 10 minutes.

Every job counts. Whether you support it or oppose it, gambling is here in Ohio.

So let's locate a casino where it will do the most good and have the broadest economic impact. The businesses and residents of the West Side have demonstrated support for a casino. I ask you to support Issue 2 this May.

Issue 2 would put the casino at the former GM Delphi Plant, an old, blighted auto plant, lying vacant and abandoned with no hope of coming back. West Broad, the Hilltop and the West Side sorely need an infusion of jobs and economic revitalization.

I'd like to recognize City Council President Mike Mentel for his leadership in working toward this solution.

Every job counts, which is why we must invest wisely in industries with the greatest potential for creating new jobs.

The health care industry is the growth industry of the 21st Century. This industry is not only healing the sick and fighting disease, it is healing our economy and fighting unemployment.

We supported the expansion of Nationwide Children's Hospital, which will create 2,000 good-paying jobs.

Children's Hospital stepped up in turn by investing in the neighborhood around it.

But that is only a beginning. Yesterday we announced a new partnership with the Ohio State University Medical Center on their \$1 billion expansion.

It will be the single largest job initiative in the history of Columbus... creating 6,000 new jobs at its main campus, adding \$1.7 billion dollars to the local economy. And it includes an unprecedented \$10 million minimum commitment to the neighborhood around Ohio State University Hospital East.

Not only will these new jobs generate an additional \$77 million in income tax for the city over the next 15 years, they will also create a new standard for health care within a world-class facility.

These dollars will be spent over 10 years to improve the housing and health of the community.

You'll see the beginning of new hope and new investment that the neighborhood has needed for so long.

The Medical Center will work with the city to buy and fix up homes. They will help families living there today and bring new families here tomorrow.

Before making this investment, OSU will work with the city, community residents and stakeholders to undertake a neighborhood assessment to guide its investment.

So the idea here is that University Hospital East improves, so should the neighborhood around it.

I want to thank Gordon Gee and all the great people at OSU and its Medical Center for their willingness to work with the city on this historic partnership.

I know you've heard me say it a hundred times, but I love being your mayor. I love tackling the projects, the issues and the challenges we face every day in our neighborhoods. And I am not going anywhere.

But what makes me proudest about being mayor is you, the people. I believe the character of our Columbus residents is like no other in the country.

You're smart. You're savvy. You have an urban sophistication mixed with Midwestern generosity. And most importantly, in tough times, you act courageously.

You exhibited that spirit last August, when you voted to save our city from catastrophe.

You exhibited that spirit last month, when the City of Columbus joined with volunteers and the local media to raise more than \$156,000 to help the victims of the tragic earthquake in Haiti.

I want to recognize Councilwoman Eileen Paley for her work on behalf of Haiti relief through the Harmony Project, which raised \$6,000 within 24 hours of the earthquake.

Our Columbus Public Health professionals showed that spirit this past year as they dealt with the H1N1 virus, protecting more than 100,000 residents.

These nurses and other health workers are the kinds of people we take for granted—until we need them. Well, we needed them, and they were there for us. Now let them hear from us. Please stand.

Columbus has so many residents of remarkable character and courage. Some perform acts of courage every day of their lives.

Like LeVon Morefield. The deck was stacked against LeVon from birth. LeVon and his older brother, Clifford, were both born addicted to cocaine. Growing up, LeVon and Clifford sold cocaine.

Clifford was eventually sentenced to a life in prison.

LeVon appeared to be headed down the same road. He was arrested three times.

During his sophomore year, LeVon missed so much school, he had a 0.0 GPA.

But then LeVon reached deep within himself to muster the strength and courage to set a new path for himself.

With the help of Karen Armstrong, a Columbus City Schools guidance counselor, and now his legal guardian, they figured it out together.

LeVon joined the Brookhaven High School football team. Remember when they won the state championship? Well, LeVon was a contributing member of that team.

LeVon then was a walk-on for the University of Akron football team. Because he didn't have a scholarship, LeVon sometimes worked two jobs, sometimes with two hours' sleep a night in order to play football.

LeVon's personal transformation and his commitment to the sport recently earned him the 2009 Rudy Award.

This award is given to the college football player who best exemplifies the determination of a walk-on. Remember the film "Rudy" about the kid who would not give up his dream to join the Notre Dame football team?

LeVon refused to give up. He decided that it's not where you start in life that matters most. It's where you end up. And it's the fight you have along the way that makes the difference.

LeVon and Karen are here tonight. Please stand.

LeVon's life is about courage, determination and commitment. It is about the power of optimism and hope.

The same power of optimism and hope that drives each of us individually is reflected in our city.

I have never been more optimistic than I am today about the future of this city.

I am optimistic because we as a city continue to meet our challenges.

I am optimistic because we as a city have the courage to fight for our future.

I am optimistic because while we believe in the basics of government, a balanced budget, fiscal prudence and the delivery of basic neighborhood services, we always set our sights high, our vision long and our standards exceptional.

We have accomplished so much together, yet we have so much more to do, so many more challenges to meet and promises to keep.

But we are on the steady road to prosperity. And for that, I thank you.

God bless you. And God bless the City of Columbus.